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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 001477

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [EINV](#) [ETTC](#) [OVIP](#) [LY](#) [IZ](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: NEW BULGARIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSES IRAQ,
BASING, OTHER BILATERAL ISSUES

Classified By: CDA Jeffrey Levine, reasons 1.5(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin told Charge' August 22 that Bulgaria would not follow the "Spanish model" in its withdrawal from Iraq. Instead, the Bulgarian departure, planned to take place before the end of the year, will be done in close consultation with the U.S. and other Coalition partners. He emphasized that the new government wants to be seen as a reliable partner, and he said Bulgaria was willing to talk about other missions. "Bulgaria will not abandon Iraq or the coalition," Kalfin said. He was eager to move ahead with discussion of possible stationing of U.S. forces in Bulgaria. Kalfin thanked the U.S. for its support on behalf of the Bulgarian medical workers imprisoned in Libya, and said he looked forward to discussing the issue with CODEL Hagel following the Senator's meetings in Tripoli. He agreed with the need to maintain a predictable, transparent environment for U.S. investors, and to continue our close cooperation on arms and dual-use export controls. Kalfin confirmed that he would be in New York September 20-22 for the UNGA FM event, and he welcomed a possible meeting with the Secretary. He may also accompany President Purvanov to NY September 16-17. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Charge' paid a courtesy call on FM Kalfin at the beginning of his first full week in office, urging the Bulgarian government to move slowly on Iraq despite a campaign promise to withdraw immediately. Kalfin, who is also one of three deputy Prime Ministers, said Bulgaria's new Socialist-led coalition government would be "a predictable and loyal partner of the U.S.," and its policy toward Iraq would be shaped within this context. The new government will stick to its predecessor's decision to withdraw its combat troops from Iraq at the end of the year, but would do so in close consultation with Coalition partners. "We are ready to talk about other missions," Kalfin said, mentioning in particular training of the Iraqi security forces, "and we need to think about Afghanistan as well." The new government looks forward to discussing its future Iraq policy with the U.S. as soon as it completes its own internal deliberations. Though Bulgaria would bring its combat troops home at the end of the year, "we are not withdrawing from Iraq or the Coalition," Kalfin said.

13. (C) Kalfin expressed a desire to quickly resume negotiations on stationing of U.S. forces in Bulgaria, but acknowledged that his government was not yet sufficiently prepared or staffed for a substantive discussion of the issue. He promised to review the proposed Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), and to re-engage as soon as possible. "We will not delay," he said. Charge' committed to invite Ambassador Loftis and his team back to Bulgaria as soon as the government is ready. Kalfin noted that Bulgaria would also like to discuss the modernization of its armed forces with the U.S. Charge' noted in response that the director of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, LTG Koler, would visit Bulgaria in mid September.

14. (C) On Libya, Kalfin said Bulgaria would continue to work within the trilateral U.S./EU/Bulgaria format to gain the release of the five Bulgarian nurses unjustly imprisoned in Libya. "We rely on your assistance and help," he said. Charge' urged Kalfin to review the food-for-thought paper provided to the previous government by deputy Legal Advisor Jonathan Schwartz. Kalfin agreed the UK presidency had further energized the EU in support of the medics. He was noncommittal, however, when asked about the prospect of direct, confidential negotiations between Bulgaria and Libya. He said that UK officials planned soon to discuss the nurses' fate with the Libyan ambassador in London, who was Minister of Justice at the time of the nurses arrest. "We need to take all measures possible" before the next court hearing on November 15, Kalfin added. He said that he looks forward to meeting with Senator Hagel on August 29, following the latter's meetings in Tripoli.

15. (C) Charge' said the U.S. wanted to increase bilateral trade and investment, but the new government must do its part to maintain a welcoming investment climate. It would send a very bad signal to U.S. investors if the recent agreement with the U.S. film production company Nu Image to privatize Boyana Film Studios were not upheld. Kalfin was supportive. He said that he had spoken to the chairman of the privatization agency about Boyana. "The contract has been

signed," he said; "I don't see any reconsideration of the deal." He cautioned, however, that the courts would likely have the final say, and suggested that the Embassy meet with the new Minister of Culture, who was the most prominent skeptic within the government. In the end, "I don't think it's going to be a problem," Kalfin said. He stressed that Bulgaria's priority was to attract more U.S. investment, and for this reason it would also like to move ahead quickly with the negotiation of a treaty on the avoidance of double taxation (DTT).

16. (C) Charge' emphasized the importance the U.S. places on arms and dual-use export controls. In response, Kalfin said he looked forward to continued cooperation between the MFA and the Embassy on this issue.

17. (C) COMMENT: The new Foreign Minister appears committed to close relations with the U.S. He clearly understands the sensitivity of Iraq in our relationship, and we will encourage him to play an advocacy role for continued Bulgarian military involvement. With less than a week in the position, he seemed familiar with important issues, but the appointment of deputy ministers and re-establishing the inter-ministerial process will be necessary before the MFA is again fully functioning.

18. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

LEVINE